

# 'A Son of the Sahara'

A Modern Story of the Desert

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By Louise Gerard

(Continued from Yesterday's Star.)

"I'm sorry," she said in a dreary tone. "But I can't understand you. I don't see how there were men who seemed just like other men and yet behaved in this extraordinary fashion."

"I'm not aware that my behavior is extraordinary. Every man in my country has a harem if he can afford it."

Deliberately he put these facts before the girl in a matter of fact and calm tone. But she was not to be so easily won. She hated him for the look of suffering on her face. She hated him for the look of suffering on her face. She hated him for the look of suffering on her face.

"Now I'm beginning to understand. But I don't want to hear anything more about it. I see now it was a mistake my asking you here. But I wanted you to know—to know."

She floundered and stopped and started again, anxious to be fair with him in spite of everything. "I wanted you to understand that the fact of your religion and race made your behavior seem quite different from what it would have been were you a European. I want you to see that I know you have your point of view, but in all fairness blame you for doing what is not wrong according to your standpoint, even if it is according to mine."

With his cold, cruel smile, he watched her floundering after excuses for him, endeavoring to see his point of view, to be just and fair. "You're very magnanimous," he said, with biting scorn.

"And you, unkind, she flashed, suddenly out of patience. 'You're making everything as hard for me as you possibly can. You're doing it deliberately, and you look as if you enjoyed hurting me. I never thought you'd be like this. Raoul, I would like to part as friends since we've been so long together. It's impossible.'"

His name on her lips made a spasmodic cross to her face. "But as he stood there fighting against himself he knew he was still madly in love with the girl he was determined to hate, and he despised himself for his own weakness."

Pansy watched him, a look of suppressed suffering shadowing her eyes. She would have given all she possessed—her cherished freedom, her independence, her life, even her life—she once thought him a man of her own color, not with this dreadful black heart between them; a tragedy so ghastly that she felt like Lucille Lemesurier, now seemed a laughing matter. He was lost to her forever. No amount of love or understanding could pull down that barrier.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand. "I'm sorry we ever dropped across one another."

Le Breton made no reply. Cold and unsmiling, he watched her. There was a brief silence.

Outside, the sea sobbed and splashed like tears against the vessel's side. But all the tears in the world could not wash the black stain from him. As they stood looking at one another, a verse came and sang like a dirge in Pansy's head:

What are we waiting for? Oh, my heart,  
Give me straight on the bow and not  
Again, my heart, my heart,  
What are we waiting for, you and I?  
A pleading look—a pleading cry—  
Good-bye forever. Good-bye, good-bye.

"Good-bye," she said again. Then he smiled his cold, cruel smile. "No, Pansy. I say—au revoir."

Ignoring her outstretched hand, he moved. Then, after one long look at her, he turned and was gone.

As the door closed behind him Pansy looked back two tears. She looked back two tears. She looked back two tears.

CHAPTER I.  
Over El-Ammeah great stars flashed, like silver lamps in the purple dome above the desert city. Their light gave a faint, misty white tinge to the scented blueness of the harem garden.

Three shadows softly, moving vague and shadowlike as a warm breeze stirred them. The walled pleasure was filled with the scent of flowers, of roses, magnolia, heliotrope, mimosa, and a hundred other blossoms, for night lay heavy upon the garden.

In sunken ponds the stars were mirrored, rocking gently on the surface of the ruffled water. Close by one of the silvered ponds, a man's figure showed, big and white in flowing garments. Against him a slender girl

Rayma's eyes rivaled the stars as she gazed up at her sultan and owner. Yet in her dark depths a touch of anxiety lurked.

A fortnight ago, the sultan had returned to El-Ammeah. The first week he had been one of blissful happiness for the Arab girl. For her master had returned more for her love than ever. But, the days went on, doubts crept into her heart, vague and haunting. At times it seemed to her he had not quite the same man who left her for Paris. For he had a habit now that he had not had before he went away—a disconcerting habit of looking at her with unseeing eyes, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

This mood was on him now. Although the night called for nothing but love and caresses, none had fallen to her lot. Although she rested against him, she might not have been there for all the notice he took. He appeared to have forgotten her, as he gazed in a brooding, longing manner at the soft, velvety depths of the purple sky—sky as deeply, softly purple as pansies.

Rayma pressed closer to her lord and sultan, looking at him with love-laden, anxious eyes.

"Beloved," she whispered softly, "are your thoughts with some woman in Paris?"

With a start, his attention came back to her. In the starlight he scanned her little face in a fierce, hungry, disappointed manner. For the slight, golden girl, who now stood upon his arm brought him none of the contentment he had known when Pansy had been there.

"No, little one," he said gently, "I prefer you to all the women I met in Paris."

Her slim arms wound round his neck in a clinging passionate embrace.

"Oh, my lord," she whispered, "such love as I have for you. At times I think you do not love me as you once did. You seem not quite the same. For, often, although your arms are around me, you forget that I am there!"

A bitter expression crossed his face. He did not forget that she was there. Although he had come back to the desert girl he had once loved, it was not her he wanted, but the girl who had scorned and flouted him, his enemy's daughter. And he tried to forget her in the slim, golden arms that held him, with such desire and passion.

"No, Rayma, I'm not quite the same," he said, stroking the little face that watched him with such love and longing. "For sixteen years and more I have waited to avenge my father's death. And now—"

He broke off, and laughed savagely. "And now—my father's murderer is almost within my grasp. Next week I start out with my men to capture him."

Revenge was a sentiment the Arab did not understand.

"Oh, my lord," she whispered, "little wonder that your mind wanders from me, even though I am within your arms. I wait when you want to Paris. But I would speed you on this quest for vengeance."

The sultan made no reply. Deep down in his own heart he

knew his excuse was a false one. It was not vengeance that came between him and Rayma—but Pansy. And now he hated the English girl, for she had robbed all other women of their sweetness.

## CHAPTER II.

Over the old fort near the river the British flag drooped limply. Many years had passed since it had last hung there. Nowadays, the place was not used, and the country was too peaceful to need forts, and the district officer lived in a corrugated iron bungalow just beyond the remains of the stockade.

It was getting on toward evening. The mist still rose from forest and shadow valley, as it had risen sixteen years before when Barclay first came to these parts. And in the stunted cliffs another generation of baboons swarmed.

On the roof of the old fort Pansy stood with her father, watching as she had often watched during her months in Africa, the sunset that each night painted the world with glory.

A golden mist draped the horizon, its edge gilded sharply and clearly. Across the golden curtain swept great fanlike rays of rose and green and glowing carmine, all radiating from a blurred mass of orange hung on the world's edge where the sun sank slowly behind the veil of gold.

The mist rolled up from the wide shallow valley, in banks and tattered ribbons, rainbow tinted. And the lakes that, in the dry season, marked the course of the sunken river gleamed like jewels in the flood of light poured out from the heavens.

The constant change and variety of the last few months had eased Pansy's pain a little.

With her father she had toured the colony. She had slept under canvas, in native huts and iron bungalows. And there were half a dozen officers on the governor's staff, all anxious to entertain his daughter.

But for the night Pansy would have enjoyed herself immensely. "Give me the nights, Pansy, and the days I'll leave to you."

Very often Raoul Le Breton's words came back to her, as she lay sleepless. It seemed that he had her nights now, that man she loved yet could not marry. Often her heart ached with a violence that kept her awake until the morning.

Pansy tried to make her nights as short as possible. She was always the last to bed and the first to rise. Her plump, pretty, mulatto maid, a mission girl Pansy had engaged in Africa, came in to serve her breakfast with the early morning tea. And whenever it was possible, she was out and away on her horseback, with some number of her father's staff.

And the day that followed was generally full of novelty and interest. There were new people to see; a wild country to travel through; some negro chief to interview; a native village to visit.

As the journey continued, the Europeans grew fewer. Until that day, when nearly a week since Pansy had seen a white face, except those of her father's suite.

Only that afternoon the furthermost point of the tour had been reached. A mile or so beyond was French territory.

With her father Pansy often went over the maps of the district and the country that lay around it. She knew that beyond the British possessions lay a sparsely populated and but little known district; vast areas, scarcely explored, of scrub and poor grass, that led on to the Back of Beyond, the limitless expanse of the burning Sahara.

But, interested as Pansy always was in all connected with her father's province, and all that lay about it, she was not thinking of any of these things as she stood on the roof with him, but of her old playmate, Capt. Cameron.

The governor, his staff and the district officer were going the next day to visit some rather important negro chief. Pansy was to have been one of the party, but on reaching their journey's end, Cameron had suddenly developed a bad attack of malaria.

"I don't think I'll go tomorrow, father," she was saying. "I don't like leaving Bob. I know his orderly can look after him all right. But he says he feels better when I'm about, so I promised to stay and hold his hand."

"Just as you like," Sir George answered. "In any case the new-found will be very similar to a dozen others you've seen. And Bob needs keeping cheerful."

"He takes it very philosophically," Pansy answered.

"It's the only way to take life," her father answered, a trifle sadly.

Pansy rubbed a soft cheek against his in silent sympathy.

She had and understood her quiet, indulgent father more than ever. But the dead girl he still grieved for was only a misty memory to his child.

"Yes, Daddy, I've learnt that too," she said. "It's no use grousing about things. It's far better to laugh in the teeth of fate."

George Barclay's arm went round his daughter.

She had followed out her own precepts, this brave, bright girl of his. As she went about his camp no one had been able to guess her life was a tragedy. And even he knew no more than she had told him on her unexpected return from Grand Ansonia, as he in his past years had fought his, in his own unselfish way, refusing to let her shadows fall on those about her.

## CHAPTER III.

About five miles away from the old fort, deep in the forest, there was a large grassy glade, an unfrequented spot.

Within it now were encamped what looked to be a large party of Arab merchants. There were about a hundred of them, and they had come early that morning, with horses, and camels, and mules, and bales of merchandise. And they outnumbered Barclay's party by nearly three to one. His following were not more than forty, including thirty Hausa soldiers.

Immediately on arriving in the glade, two of the Arabs, with curious, had been dispatched to the English camp outwardly to see their goods, but, in reality, as spies.

They had hardly gone, before the rest of the party put aside its peaceful air. Out of their bales weapons were produced; guns of the latest pattern and vicious-looking knives.

In his tent the Sultan, Casim Ahmed, sat, in white burnoose, awaiting the return of his spies. With him was Edouard, his French doctor, who was watching his royal master with an air of concern.

"I shall be glad when this thing is through and done with," he remarked presently, his voice heavy with anxiety. "And all I hope is that the English don't get hold of you. There'll be short shrift for you, if you're caught meddling with their affairs."

"They'd shoot me, as Barclay shot my father," the Sultan replied grimly. "But I'm willing to risk that in order to get hold of him."

"I wish we were safely back in El-Ammeah," the doctor said.

"You've never experienced either a deep love or a deep hate, Edouard. The surface of things has always satisfied you. You're to be envied."

(Continued in Tomorrow's Star.)

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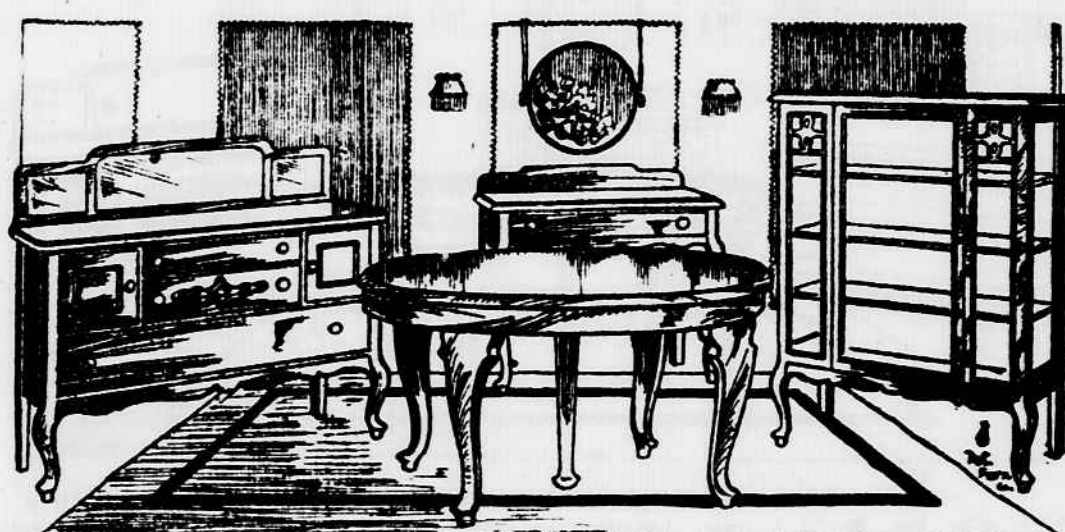
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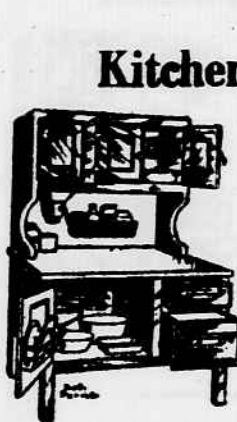
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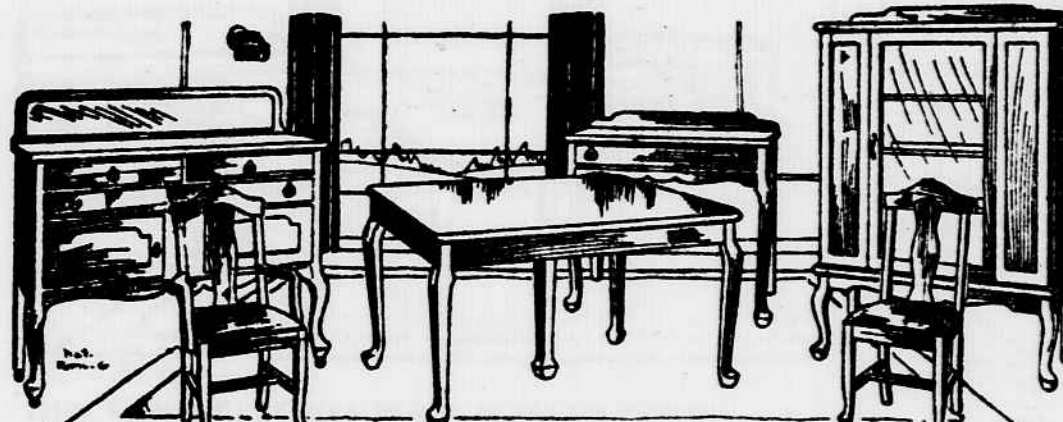
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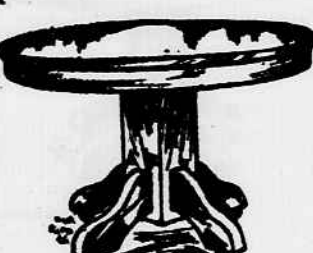
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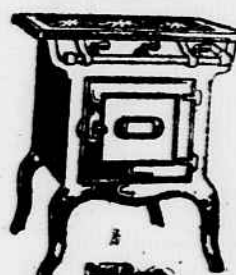


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